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AN EARTH GODDESS

After the Advance, 1917

BY RICHARD ALDINGTON

You are not the august mother
Nor even one of her comely daughters,
But you gave shelter to men,
Hid birds and little beasts within your hands
And twined flowers in your hair.

Sister, you have been sick of a long fever,
You have been torn with throes
Fiercer than childbirth and yet barren;
You are plague-marked;
There are no flowers in your hair.

I have seen your anguish, O Sister,
I have seen your wounds.
But now there is come upon you peace,
A peace unbroken, profound,
Such as came upon the mother of King Eteocles
When both her sons were dead.
For in your agony, Sister,
When men bruised and ravished you,
You remembered the wide kindness of our mother
And gave shelter to each of them that rent you,
Shielded them from death with your delicate body,
And received their clotted corpses into your once pure breast.

And now since you have endured,
Since for all your wrong and bitter pain
There came no hatred upon you
But only pity and anguish
Such as the mother of King Eteocles felt
Gazing upon her two angry sons—
Because of this, your peace is wonderful.

Underfoot are a few scant grasses
Amid rusty ruin;
Overhead the last of your larks
Cries shrilly before the broken clouds;
And for your sake, O my Sister,
O daughter of our great Earth-Mother,
Because of your old pain
And long-suffering and sweetness,
Because of the new peace
Which lies so deep upon you,
The chains of my bitterness are broken,
The weight of my despair leaves me.